

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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R 281530Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6006
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AMEMBASSY NASSAU
AMEMBASSY PORT

C O N F I D E N T I A L KINGSTON 3418

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINS, ELAB, JM
SUBJECT: REFINERY STRIKE: TECHNICIANS STILL OUT BUT GALOLINE
AGAIN AVAILABLE

REFERENCE: KINGSTON 3381

1. AS OF MORNING ON JUNE 28, THE STRIKE OF TECHNICAL STAFF AT THE ESSO REFINERY CONTINUES. HOWEVER, THE LIKELIHOOD OF AN ISLANDWIDE GASOLINE AND DIESEL FAMINE HAS APPARENTLY DISAPPEARED, SINCE THE PICKET LINE AT THE REFINERY WAS WITHDRAWN ON SATURDAY LAT (JUNE 25). THE UNION REPRESENTING THE WORKERS -- THE NATIONAL WORKERS UNION (NWU) -- AND ESSO MANAGEMENT HAVE REPORTEDLY EACH BEEN GIVEN A NEW SET OF PROPOSALS BY LABOR MINISTER WILLIAM ISAACS WHICH THE MINISER HOPES CAN LAY THE BASIS FOR A MEETING BETWEEN THE PARTIES LATER TODAY. THE PRIMARY HOPE IS, OF COURSE, THAT THE NEW PROPOSALS WILL LEAD TO AN END OF THE STRIKE.

2. THE DECISION BY THE GOVERNMENT ON THURSDAY,
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JUNE 23, TO EMPLOY ITS SECURITY FORCES TO ENSURE THE MOVEMENT OF PETROLEUM PRODUCTS TO SELECTED OUTLETS APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN THE KEY FACTOR IN ENDING THE PICKETING OF THE REFINERY BY THE STRIKING TECHNICAL STAFF, THE HONORING OF THE PICKET LINE BY TANK TRUCK DRIVERS, AND THUS THE DANGER OF AN ACUTE SHORTAGE OF FUEL FOR ROAD TRANSPORT. THE PROSPECT OF SUCH

SHORTAGES HAD VERY QUICKLY BEGUN TO ERODE WHATEVER SYMPATHY THE 60 STRIKING TECHNICIANS MAY HAVE AROUSED AND THERE WAS A POSITIVE RESPONSE TO THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO EMPLOY THE JAMAICA DEFENSE FORCE (JDF) TO MOVE NEEDED SUPPLIES. AS A RESULT, THE NWU BACKED AWAY FROM ITS SUPPORT FOR THE PICKETING OF THE REFINERY AND AGREED TO PERMIT THE USUAL DELIVERY FIRMS TO RESUME WORK ON THE EXPLICIT UNDERSTANDING THAT THE SECURITY FORCES WOULD BE WITHDRAWN.

3. WHILE THE STRIKE BY THE TECHNICAL STAFF CONTINUES, IT IS UNLIKELY TO AFFECT THE AVAILABILITY OF FUEL. (ESSO GENERAL MANAGER POINDEXTER SAID ON SATURDAY THAT HIS PROBLEM HAS NOT BEEN MAINTAINING PRODUCTION BUT RATHER THE REMOVAL OF STORED SUPPLIES; HAD THE PICKETING REMAINED EFFECTIVE, HE WOULD HAVE BEEN FORCED TO CLOSE DOWN PRODUCTION FOR LACK OF STORAGE.) THUS, SINCE THE STRIKERS HAVE ABANDONED THE ONE TRULY EFFECTIVE WEAPON THEY POSSESSED, WE CAN NOW ASSESS THE MEANING OF THE WEEKEND'S EXCITEMENT EVEN THOUGH SOME DAYS MAY YET BE REQUIRED TO RESOLVE THE DISPUTE.

-- THE NWU HAS BEEN ABLE TO DEMONSTRATE THAT IT CAN IGNORE THE GOVERNMENT INsofar AS THE MEDIATION PROCESS IS CONCERNED (IT REFUSED TO OBEY A BACK-TO-WORK ORDER) BUT IT IS NOT ANXIOUS TO PERSIST IN A COURSE OF ACTION WHICH HAS AROUSED CONFIDENTIAL

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POPULAR RESENTMENT (THE ABSENCE OF GASOLINE THREATENED TO UNDERMINE THE RESPECT THE NWU WAS GAINING BY ITS DISPLAY OF INDEPENDENCE).

-- THE GOVERNMENT WAS VIEWED POSITIVELY AS A RESULT OF ITS WILLINGNESS TO TAKE STERN MEASURES TO INSURE THAT PUBLIC AND PRIVATE TRANSPORT STAYED IN OPERATION; THE RULING PEOPLES NATIONAL PARTY LOST LUSTRE BECAUSE OF ITS INABILITY TO FORCE ITS LABOR AFFILIATE, THE NWU, TO ACCEPT THE BACK-TO-WORK ORDER WHICH IN TURN COMPELLED IT TO FALL BACK ON THE SECURITY FORCES TO PREVENT DAMAGE TO THE COMMUNITY.

4. WHATEVER LESSON WE MAY DRAW FROM THIS INCIDENT REGARDING THE CONDUCT OF LABOR RELATIONS IN JAMAICA, THE EPISODE IS PROBABLY MOST NOTEWORTHY FOR WHAT IT TELLS US ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT'S ATTITUDE TOWARD DEALING WITH A SHORTAGE SITUATION WHICH, FOR MANY JAMAICANS, WAS VERY ACTIVELY FEARED, IF NOT ACTUALLY FELT. THE PROMPTNESS WITH WHICH THE GOVERNMENT WAS WILLING TO EMPLOY THE JDF REVEALS ITS OWN DETERMINATION TO FORESTALL A SHORT-AGE EVEN THOUGH THOSE OSTENSIBLY AGGRIEVED WERE NOT ONLY WORKERS BUT WORKERS REPRESENTED BY THE UNION WITH

WHICH THE RULING PARTY HAS HAD THE MOST INTIMATE TIES.
IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT THE GOVERNMENT WELCOMED A CHANCE
TO DEMONSTRATE ITS WILLINGNESS TO MOVE WITH DESPATCH
TO PREVENT A SHORTAGE FROM OCCURRING.
DORRANCE

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